

## HOT DISH POLITICS

# Four in GOP seek suburban seat

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Republicans in the western suburbs see the Third District as a winnable seat in Congress, with Rep. Dean Phillips out.

But is the open seat still open to Republicans? And what kind of Republican?

Four candidates presented their theories at a forum in Osseo on Wednesday.

About 100 people crowded into a room at the Osseo Community Center to hear candidates Tad Jude, Brad Kohler, Jamie Page and Quentin Wittrock talk about how they could win the election for the GOP in a part of the metro that has been trending more blue.

"I'm the most qualified and electable candidate," said Jude, a former judge and state lawmaker.

"We're going to need somebody who's going to speak the truth," said Kohler, an entrepreneur.

"I'm a true conservative," said Page, a businessman.

"I would not accept President Trump's endorsement, and I am not supporting President Trump," said Wittrock, a retired attorney.

Though he got only tepid applause for that line from the Republican crowd, Wittrock's contention is that a moderate like himself can bring other moderates and independent voters into a Republican-voting coalition.

Jude, Kohler and Page all professed support for Trump and are more focused on appealing to conservative voters.

Wittrock's main points of differentiation were his disdain for congressional investigations — he said he wanted to focus on making laws — and his stance that most people in the district will not vote for anyone who proposes an abortion ban.

"Voters in this district mistakenly drew the conclusion that all Republicans were



From left, Tad Jude, Brad Kohler, Jamie Page and Quentin Wittrock are the four Republican candidates seeking the Third Congressional District seat. Incumbent U.S. Rep. Dean Phillips, a Democrat who ran for president, is not seeking re-election.

MAGA Republicans," Wittrock said.

He contended that Phillips flipped the seat by being more moderate and casting himself as an antidote to Trump in the 2018 midterm elections.

Kohler, an ex-mixed martial arts fighter, had a more pugnacious approach: "I want to bring the fight to the Democrats," he said.

On abortion, Kohler said he liked that the question is now answered by state governments, while Jude and Page both said they did not support

abortion rights.

Another difference? How much money the candidates think it will take to win the district. Page and Jude estimated it would take \$2 million or more to win a general election, while Wittrock and Kohler said they thought they could win with less.

The four Republican candidates' views are broadly similar, even if Wittrock is pitching a different approach.

All four claim the DFL's likely nominee, state Sen. Kelly Morrison, is too progressive

and wants to raise taxes and fees. They want to lower taxes and cut government spending.

While Jude, Page and Wittrock talked about cutting spending to curb inflation, Kohler said he wanted to take on those private companies that have effectively established monopolies and raised prices.

"It's basically just poor management," Kohler said.

Jude said he wanted to see tighter management of public funds. He cited local examples such as the Southwest light-

rail line and the public funds misspent in the Feeding Our Future case.

Wittrock also said he opposed student loan forgiveness because of budget impacts, and he questioned other aid. "Handouts have to end," he said.

On the issue of immigration, all four object to allowing anyone into the United States without the right paperwork.

Page said he preferred highly skilled immigrants. "It's about contributing, not just receiving," he said, adding



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that he did not want people in the country who would "weigh it down."

On energy, all four said they supported more fossil fuels but left the door open to other kinds of energy.

"Whether it's solar, wind, or plant more trees, we need to quit buying our resources overseas," Kohler said.

Jude, who advocated for waste-to-energy when he served in the Legislature, said he also supported the continued operation of the Hennepin Energy Recovery Center to avoid more landfills.

But which combination of issues and approach will appeal to Republican activists at the April 27 endorsing convention?

Whichever candidate emerges will need to turn out more conservative voters or find a way to appeal to independents and moderate Democrats in November.

Republicans last won the seat in 2016, the last year former Rep. Erik Paulsen ran for re-election. But that year only about 40% of the district's voters went for Trump.

Then Phillips flipped the seat in 2018, and the district went for Biden with nearly 60% of the vote in 2020.

Phillips won re-election with almost 60% support in 2022.

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